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ABSTRACT

The contradiction in instructional supervisors' roles between helping and rating teachers raises questions about the nature of supervisory authority. Three novels--Golding's "Lord of the Flies," Huxley's "Brave New World," and Kesey's "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest"--illustrate the general problem of combining social control with individual freedom. Teacher supervision is a special case of the general concept of social control, and the question of balancing supervisors' control and teachers' individual freedom is but a specific instance of the larger problem. Part of the difficulty arises from the lack of a clear definition of the purposes and functions of instructional supervision. Discussion by various writers on the purposes of teacher supervision indicates that supervisors need to be enlightened, to work to improve performance, and to help teachers to be free to function better. With such an understanding, supervisors would be more oriented toward teacher growth than teacher defects and would foster a more collaborative relationship with teachers. (Author/RW)

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A Professional Publication for Educational Administrators

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

Published bi-monthly, February to December

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This paper searches for a philosophical understanding of the nature of supervisory authority as it is used to control instructional practice and help teachers develop professionally. The author does this through the message conveyed about the notion of social control contained in three novels. (Ed.)

LORD OF A BRAVE NEW CUCKOO'S NEST: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUPERVISORY AUTHORITY

Peter Grimmett

INTRODUCTION

The demand for education is currently in a state of decline. One of the effects of this trend could be a tightening of the control exercised by supervisors over teachers. But such constraints as may be placed on instructional practice will have to be carefully thought through. Both Lortie (1975) and McGregor (1978) argue that teacher education programmes can only be viewed as partial preparation for the rigorous demands of classroom instruction; supervisors may, therefore, be held accountable in the 1980s for completing the professional preparation of classroom teachers. As such, they may choose to adopt the Mosher and Purpel (1972) view that "a supervisor is a teacher of teachers, concerned with the content, method, and effects of classroom teaching" (p.64). To do so, however, raises questions about the paradoxical roles of helping and rating at one and the same time. Questions as to the practicability of such a combination of roles immediately come to mind. Is such an approach to supervision feasible, given that teachers consider themselves as professionals, semi-autonomous from hierarchical controls, and not, for the most part, competing for hierarchical success? (Dornbusch and Scott, 1975). Is it even remotely possible, given that supervisors are often administrators whose careers, activities, and perspectives are enmeshed in a normative context which affects their jobs, their daily behaviour, their attitudes, and ultimately their beliefs about the nature of education? (March, 1978, pp. 230-231).

These questions arise because we have, as March (1978) points out, allowed our current beliefs about educational administration to overemphasize the comprehension of human existence in behavioural terms, and have consequently underemphasized the appreciation of human existence through criticism and aesthetics (p.243).

The intent of this paper is to search for a philosophical understanding of the nature of supervisory authority as it is used to control instructional practice and help teachers complete their professional preparation for the classroom. Such a search necessitates a close look at the nature of human nature and the concept of authority as it is used in social settings.

AN UNDERSTANDING OF SUPERVISORY AUTHORITY

Much can be learned from literary novels about the philosophical assumptions that underpin the concept of supervision. Three such novels are Golding's Lord of the Flies, Huxley's Brave New World, and Kesey's One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest. Golding in his imaginative description of the leadership struggle between Ralph and Jack, depicts a conflict of two radically differing conceptions of authority. This conflict eventually develops into a war between two worlds - "the world of hunting, tactics, fierce

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exhilaration, skill," as epitomized by Jack, and "the world of longing and baffled common-sense" depicted in Ralph. Such a struggle is fundamental to human existence; it is a struggle from which man can never hope for respite, for these two worlds comprise the dual nature of man - the emotional and the rational.

Huxely is deeply concerned with man's adulation of scientific advancement and his consequent powerlessness in the face of manipulative and abusive use of technological achievements. Science has destroyed the individuality of man; the individual is no longer reponsible for himself or anybody else, and having lost respect for individuality, has become part of "the organization". Brave New World and its single ideology, emphasizes the need for conformity in social, political and personal matters. Through conditioning an individual is controlled, not only in his behaviour but also in his intelligence quotient - consequently, he can never exercise free will. Huxley expresses man's loss of individuality in his portrayal of numerous identical twins performing identical tasks. Although convinced that man could do something to counter these threats to his freedom, Huxley argues that man is unwilling to make the costly effort; he prefers a world of comfort and glib happiness instead of the sometimes painful experience of truth and beauty.

Kesey's One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest deals with the nature of power and control, who has it, how it flows, its effects on the people it is directed against, and on the people who wield it. Randle McMurphy challenges the institutionalized authoritarianism of Big Nurse, by uniting the inmates under his leadership. Big Nurse is a deliberate caricature, living through her malevolent passion for order. McMurphy, on the other hand, is a fun-loving, lusty reveller whose objective is "blowing the men back to full size". The ward, in which the novel is set, is a factory for the Combine, that mysterious power organization which regiments the lives of the patients, and is a picture of the dehumanization that is effected by an institution under the guise of humanity. Conflict inevitably ensues when the life-loving McMurphy opposes the anti-life force embodied in Big Nurse's passion for order and her obdurate stance. He demonstrates unequivocally how to defy the Combine's mechanistic authority structure with resistance, persistance, love and laughter; for, in the final analysis, self-reliance is the only antidote to institutional stupidity.

All three novels focus on human nature. Yet none of these authors is saying that human nature is evil; rather, they are intimating that human nature has potential for good or evil. Implicitly, they appeal for the potential for good in human nature to be realized by individuals within society and for those vested with authority in an organizational setting to create an environment which is conducive to that realization. The focus on human nature is but an aspect of the larger problem that all three novels address: the problem of social control and individual freedom. Russell (1964) addresses this question:

> How can we combine that degree of individual initiative which is necessary for progress with the degree of social cohension that is necessary for survival (p.1).

The novels by Golding, Huxley, and Kesey describe problem situations where the delicate balance between social control and individual freedom has been impaired. In Golding's Lord of the Flies, there is an obvious lack of social constraints, whereas both Huxley's Brave New World and Kesey's One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest demonstrate an irrefutable excess of order which ultimately denies not only individual freedom but human life itself.

Authority at the societal level is therefore the right vested in certain persons and positions to make binding decisions in order to ensure social control and stability. This right has been classified by Peabody (1962) into four broad categories: "1) authority of legitimacy; 2) authority of position, including the sanctions inherent in position; 3) authority of competence including both technical skills and experience; and 4) authority of person, including leadership and human relations skills" (p.466). Excessive use of this right leads to either mindlessness or rebellion on the part of those individuals subject to such behaviour; such behaviour is often deemed "authoritarian." A failure to make binding decisions is equally unstable and erratic in its effect; such behaviour, often deemed "laissez-faire," does not provide the necessary steady environment in which individual freedom can be fully developed and expressed. "Authoritative" is reserved as a description for that behaviour which fully carries out its responsibility to exercise binding, stabilizing decisions but recognizes that the ultimate purpose of that authority is to establish a stable equilibrium in which the individual can be free.

Supervision of instruction, it would seem, is but a special case of the more general concept of social control. Golding's novel suggests that, without some form of constraint, society would degenerate into chaos; correspondingly, in a public education system, it could be argued that instructional practice might become overly individualistic without some form of supervisory control which holds teachers accountable for what they do in classrooms. The novel by Huxley demonstrates how totalitarian control obliterates personal identity and furnishes the individual with choices which, in the final analysis, are merely absurd; such a form of control exercised by the supervisor would deny the professional identity of teachers and ultimately eradicates the need for instructional personnel. Kesey's Cuckoo's Nest evidences a machine-like power structure which controls people. An instructional supervisor exercising a similarly mechanistic form of control would adopt the view of the teacher as a professionally trained technician and attempt to render the learning situation for students as teacher-proof as is possible. As in the more general setting of society, so in the specific situation of instruction there appears to be a definite need for some form of constraint. Yet social control is only necessary to provide the stable base upon which individual freedom and initiative can be truly exercised; likewise, instructional supervision seeks to provide the quality control and continuity necessary for individual teachers to develop more fully as both professionals and human beings. Onles (1969) puts it most succinctly:

> There is nothing about supervision of teachers and teaching that is negative, debilitating, or destructive. There is much about the way supervision is conducted that is abusing and abusive. Continual and properly conducted supervision ensures the social relevance of the schools, the effectiveness of instruction and the efficiency of learning. (p.136)

The problem in supervisory practice is a similar one to that evidenced at a societal level in the novels of Golding, Huxley and Kesey - the delicate balance between control and individual freedom has become desultory, leaving practicing supervisors and teachers alike in a quandary as to the purpose behind the authority vested in the position of instructional supervisor.

SUPERVISORY AUTHORITY: A PERPLEXITY

A fundamental concern of supervision is the question of "whether schools use people to accomplish organizational ends or whether people use schools to accomplisy human ends?" (Sergiovanni and Starratt, 1979, p.66). Put another way, for what purpose and in what fashion should supervisory authority be exercised when professionals working with other professionals to maintain and improve the instructional program are caught up in the intricate web of a formal organization? Sergiovanni and Starratt argue that "supervisors work to exert the human dimension in schools . . . such human concerns require the school as an organization to serve its inhabitants, rather than traditional supervisory patterns which required individuals to serve the school" (p.66).

Yet, to many supervisors in the educational system this perspective appears to be impracticable. Their position in the authority structure is ill-defined and often quite vulnerable. There is a lack of clarity in the definition of the supervisory role and a general lack of agreement regarding the functions associated with supervision.

Alfonso, Firth and Neville (1975) contend that no supervisor can work as an agent of change in the improvement, support, and study of instructional behaviour unless the organization to which he is responsible holds itself accountable for creating a support system in which effective instructional supervision is highly valued, given appropriate status, and is rewarded within the formal organization structure. These authors perceive supervisory authority as having become for too long "laissez-faire" and they are issuing a call for this imbalance to be redressed.

Brauner and Burns (1965, pp.125-127), whilst not decrying the need for a solid authority base in instructional supervision, posit that organization and order are merely necessary as springboards to creativity. They are concerned, however, lest the constraint exercised to establish such order leads to authoritarianism and issue a definite caution about the overuse of authority:

> When men insist on more order than can be proved necessary, they are asking for mere conformity . . . Instead of pouring their energy into creative activities they must hack away at the crabgrass of conformity just to secure a small patch of dirt on which to rest from exhaustion . . . The extension of order must be made to justify itself at each step and to retreat where justification cannot be found (pp. 126-127).

Despite the dilemma facing supervisors over the use and misuse of authority, some system of authority is essential for organizational stability and survival. Markowitz (1976) very definitely realizes the need for supervisory authority but sees the situation complicated by the fact that "supervisors face the dilemma of being middle management personnel committed, on the one hand, to the achievement and survival concerns of educational organization and, on the other, to authentic human concerns that revolve around the feelings, worth, and independence of human beings" (p.372). She further contends:

> The legitimate authority of instructional supervisory behaviour should function to provide an enlightened process of human inter-action, a greater awareness of ways in which people learn and change, and, finally, it should improve the quality of life within the system and within the greater society (p.372).

This is another way of saying that the right vested in supervisors to make binding decisions for purposes of instructional quality control should always be directed towards the development of a freeing atmosphere in which teachers can exercise initiative and attempt to innovate without fear of recrimination.

Benne (1970) takes the issue of authority in education one step further and proposes a new model for a more "rational situational determination" of educational process, which he calls "anthropogogical authority," where men and women of all ages engage in "mutual renewal and reconstruction of persons-in-cultures," learn to accept conflict as part of the reality of contemporary life and education, and "focus processes of joint learning upon the very issues which are involved in conflicts" (p.400). He suggests that educators deal with these issues through collaboration, dialogue, and commitment. He bases a working definition of authority on a general condition of human development in which the individual or group "fulfilling some purpose, project or need, requires guidance or direction from a source outside himself or itself":

> The ultimate bearer of educational authority is a community life in which its subjects are seeking fuller and more valued membership. Actual bearers and subjects of this authority must together build a proximate set of mutual relationships in which the aim is the development of skills, knowledges, values, and commitments which will enable the subjects to function more fully and adequately as participants in a wider community life which lies beyond the proximate educational associations. (p.401)

According to Benne, therefore, supervisory authority is conceived of as the right for an outside source to give to an individual or group who request it the guidance or direction to enable them to fulfill some purpose, project or need and thereby acquire a fuller, more valid membership of the educational community. The aim of such authority is not to bring about conformity or dependency but rather to establish the environment

in which teachers are free to function more adequately in instructional matters, and to become more responsibly independent as professionals and human beings.

Such an understanding of supervisory authority would, it seems, provide the beginnings of a propitious basis for successful classroom intervention. Supervisors acting in this way could find the task of combining evaluation with consultation less awesome, freeing them to concentrate on motivating teachers towards those research-supported instructional behaviours that make a difference to student learning behaviour. Such a practice presupposes that supervisors see the need to extend both their knowledge of the teaching process and their inter-personal communication skills since these provide the basis for what Sergiovanni and Starratt (1979) call the "functional authority" of competence and person. Classroom intervention along these lines would lean towards what Jackson (1971) describes as a "growth approach" — not simply that there is no specific time at which a given person becomes a teacher but rather that "there is no definable time at which a teacher stops becoming one" (p.26,27). Teachers are viewed as constantly in the act of becoming and in need of continuing education as a result. Supervisors use their authority, therefore, not to pinpoint defects as such, but rather to foster ways in which instruction can be improved. The collaborative nature of the relationship would be stressed so as to promote an atmosphere where supervisors and teachers could, in Russell's (1964) terms, "Cooperate as friends" in the fight against instances of languor which may occur in classrooms as a result of the exacting demands the pressures make on a teacher's energy. This would allow the "competitive ferocity" of each individual to be expressed against a common enemy - instructional stagnation - thus using supervisory authority to move away from what Blumberg (1974) has described as "a private, cold war". In the final analysis, supervisory authority understood in this way could help to alleviate some of the confusion surrounding the implementation of clinical supervision. Practitioners could see the way clear to exercise the authority vested in the supervisory position to build up the supportive atmosphere so necessary to successful intervention and then, within that atmosphere, be encouraged to give and receive the substantive, technical criticism without which neither teaching nor supervision will improve.

CONCLUSION

"Lord of a Brave New Cuckoo's Nest" raises a significant question about the purpose and nature of supervisory authority: to what end is the authority used and how does its use influence and affect the interpersonal relationship that inevitably develops between one professional and another? I have argued that the exercise of some authority is quite essential for the supervisor to discharge his indirect responsibility to student learners successfully; that the purpose of such authority is to facilitate the development of authority and expertise in classroom teachers, enabling them to contribute productively to the appraisal, revision, and renewal of instructional practice; and that the nature of the authority will be such that the ensuing relationship will be characterized by a high degree of mutual respect, trust, and constructive criticism where both supervisor and teacher are not only secure in their individual differences and conceive of themselves as being immersed in the process of becoming more effective practitioners. It seems to me that this conception of supervisory authority can serve as a working hypothesis to bring semi-autonomous, professional teachers and "hierarchical," normatively coopted supervisors together for the purpose of improving the experiences our children have in schools.

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